

STATEMENT OF KATHERINE H. STEVENSON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 231, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE NATIONAL CAVE AND KARST RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

May 21, 1997

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to provide the Subcommittee with the views of the National Park Service on S. 231, a bill to establish the National Cave and Karst Research Institute. Similar legislation was introduced and a hearing was held before this Subcommittee during the 104th Congress. The National Park Service supports this legislation; however, funding has not been requested in the Administration's budget request. For the Institute to become a reality we need two things--funding would need to be provided by Congress for the NPS share, and the public/private partners would need to match the federal appropriations. Federal funding for this proposal would be contingent upon NPS budget constraints and Administration priorities.

If enacted, S. 231 would establish a National Cave and Karst Research Institute for the purpose of furthering the science of speleology, encouraging public education in the field, and promoting and developing environmentally sound and sustainable resource management practices. The Institute would be located near Carlsbad Caverns National Park. Management and operation of the Institute would be based on a partnership between the National Park Service and a public or private agency selected by the Secretary.

Cave and karst systems are vital to humankind in many ways. The protection and management of water resources have been identified as major issues facing the planet as we enter the 21st century--

and a full 25 percent of America's freshwater resources exist in groundwater in cave and karst regions. Caves also serve as rich storehouses of information about natural resources, human history, evolution, and global climate change--not to mention such current concerns as waste disposal, petroleum recovery, and biomedical investigations.

Congress created a major impetus for America's involvement in cave and karst protection and management by passing the landmark Federal Cave Resources Protection Act of 1988. This Act, among other things, directed the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to inventory and list significant caves on Federal lands. The nationwide assessment of significant Federally owned caves began in 1994. This action has added greatly to the number of known caves on Federal land, and increased the impetus for cave management and research. Federal land managers have since developed a heightened awareness of the management needs of the cave and karst resources on these lands and of their growing needs for assistance in inventorying and classifying their cave and karst resources. It is also evident that in order to succeed in this effort, the private sector as well as other public agencies need to be part of the project. We will need to develop partnerships which will bring funding, as well as research and program content, to the project.

The foundation for S. 231 stems from the study prepared by the National Park Service in response to P.L. 101-578 (November 15, 1990). In that law, Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Director of the National Park Service, to establish and administer a Cave Research Program and to prepare a study that examines the feasibility of establishing a centralized National Cave and Karst Research Institute.

The NPS study was completed in December of 1994. The study recommended that the Institute be jointly administered by the National Park Service and another entity. Congress has identified the National Park Service as project lead since it manages over 60 park units containing significant cave resources. It has had a Cave and Karst Research Program in place since March 1991, and it already has an appropriate general cooperative management model in use, called a "Cooperative Park Studies Unit." The National Park Service would have ultimate responsibility for the Institute, and would retain indirect control over its activities and programs. An academic entity would plan, coordinate, and administer the Institute and its programs.

The location that the study recommended is a local community (rather than a National Park Service unit) that possesses significant cave resources, is easily accessible to researchers, students, and other visitors, is located near the academic entity with which it is associated, and is large enough to offer a favorable quality of life in order to attract and retain high-quality employees and their families. As specifically directed by P.L. 101-578, the study focused on locating the Institute near the region surrounding Carlsbad Caverns National Park. The Carlsbad location was identified by the study because of the documented strong local-community and political support, and the numerous and diverse cave and karst resources found throughout the region.

It is estimated that the cost for the Institute during the first five years, if space for the Institute were donated to the NPS, would exceed \$1.2 million for operating and capital expenses alone over the five year period. Since New Mexico State University is considering housing the Institute at its Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center during the first five years, it is anticipated that a permanent facility would need to be built by the sixth year of operation. The estimated construction

cost of the Institute exceeds \$1.2 million.

It is critical in times of decreasing budgets and resources that the dictates of this legislation be accomplished jointly--between the National Park Service and a designated partner in this venture, such as the State of New Mexico, New Mexico State University, or private entities. Technical cooperators for research projects could include organizations such as the Karst Waters Institute, the National Speleological Society, the Cave Research Foundation, and the American Cave Conservation Association.

All funds and efforts of the NPS must be matched at least equally and responsibility for the success of the project must be shared. We would strongly recommend a change in bill language to emphasize this position. In Section 4 (c) and (e) as well as Section 5 (a) we would suggest changing the Secretary "may" to the Secretary "shall". This would reaffirm that the commitment to the project is the responsibility of all parties, and its success depends completely on cooperative efforts. Without cooperation, existing NPS projects and programs would be jeopardized.

This concludes my prepared remarks concerning S. 231, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.